

Encouraging Signs for Women's Representation in the AVMA House of Delegates in 2014

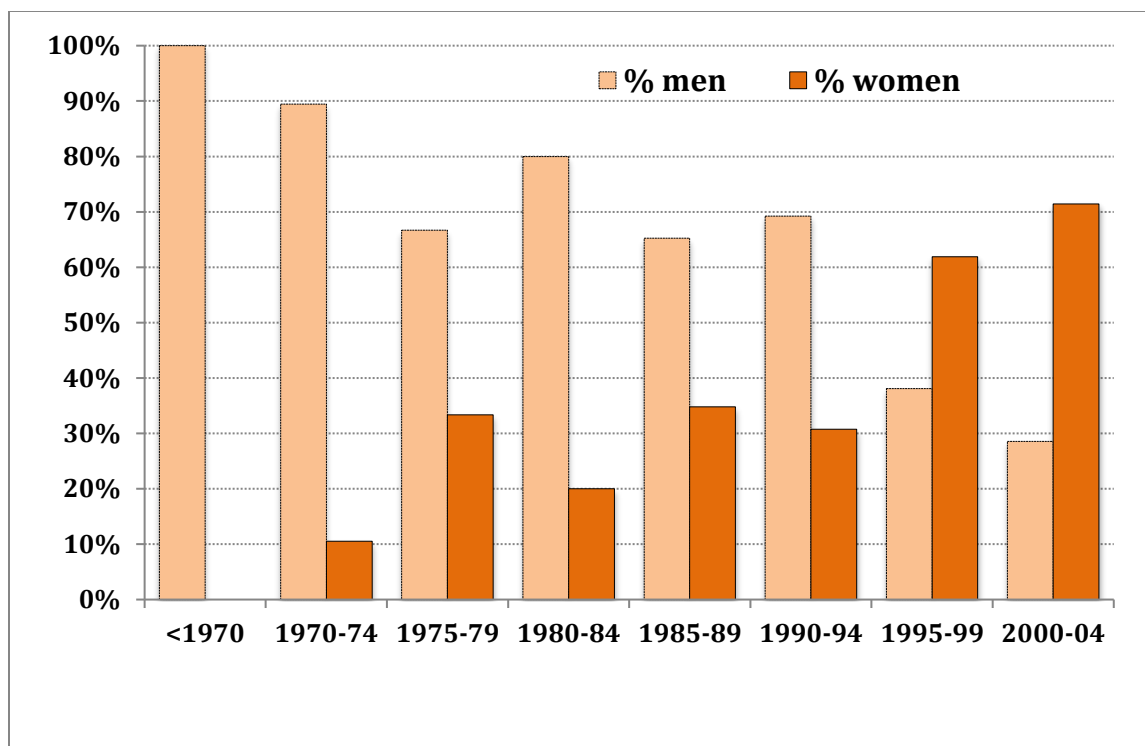
By Dr. Donald F. Smith and Julie Kumble, with assistance from Lisa Greenhill and Nate Watson
August 11, 2014

In the companion article posted on July 31st,¹ we reported that the percentage of women delegates in the current House of Delegates (HOD) is 31.4%.² As hopeful as those data appeared relative to the proportion of women we reported a year ago (25%),³ we also expressed concern that the voting power of women delegates was constrained because of the proportional weight of the delegates from the ten largest states, eight of whom are men. This is not to imply that men who serve on the HOD fail to make wise and informed decisions, but rather that the deliberations of a decision-making body as critical to the profession as the HOD, should be more representative of the gender profile of the AVMA membership, which is now well over 50% women.

In this article, we present data that further define the demographic profile of women in the House. The following graph shows the percentage of men and women HOD members (delegates and alternates are combined in this graph), segmented by years of graduation from veterinary college.

The high proportion of women HOD members who graduated in the most recent five-year periods (including the years 1995-99 and 2000-04) represents the period when the percentage of women graduates increased from approximately 65% to 72% of the aggregate of US colleges. Though the number of HOD women delegates and alternates who graduated during these two five-year periods is not large (15 and 5, respectively), there appears to be a close parallel between the percentage of women graduating during this period and the percentage of women delegates and alternates in the House.

This is especially encouraging because it shows progress over the proportion of women in the HOD who graduated in the 15 previous years (1980-1994). Women who graduated during that earlier period have lower proportionate representation in the HOD compared to their male colleagues. For example, while the proportion of women graduates ranged from about 40% in the early 1980s, increasing to 50% in the late 1980s, and to 60% in the early 1990s, the percentage of women currently in the HOD who graduated during that period was far less, ranging from 20% (early 1980s) to less than 40% a decade later.



Graph 1. Percentage of men and women in House of Delegates segmented by years of graduation from veterinary college. Delegates and alternates are combined in this graph.

(From AVMA website, www.AVMA.org), July 1, 2014)⁴

There may be multiple personal, professional and even institutional reasons why women who graduated more recently (1995-2004) are proportionately well-represented in the House. We do not assume that these demographic changes are happening simply because more women are graduating and joining the profession. After all, the evidence from earlier graduating years (noted above) do not support that conclusion any more than well-documented evidence from other professions.

Though the numbers are not high, the data presented here are encouraging. In the future, we would like to explore potential causative factors and propose recommendations for replicating successful strategies to encourage even greater proportions of female participation.

While not simply a numbers issue—women don’t add value by just “being at the table”—we believe that the women who have been in the HOD and who are being added now in greater numbers, are not only making a substantive and positive difference, but have great capacity to add real value to the profession as we face the challenges ahead.

The authors thank Dr. Lisa Greenhill, Associate Executive Director for Institutional Research and Diversity at AAVMC, for her contributions and review of this story; also Mr. Nate Watson ’17 for his contributions to data collection.

¹ Smith, Donald F. and Julie Kumble. Women in the AVMA's 2014 House of Delegates, with Some Government Comparisons. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. July 31, 2014.

² [2013-14 AVMA House of Delegates](#). AVMA website, July 1, 2014.

³ Smith Donald F. and Julie Kumble. Women's Leadership in the U.S. Congress and the AVMA's House of Delegates: Exploring Parallels and Looking Forward. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. April 28, 2013.

⁴ [2013-14 AVMA House of Delegates](#). AVMA website, July 1, 2014

KEYWORDS:

American Veterinary Medical Association
House of Delegates
Women's Leadership in Veterinary Medicine
Women Veterinarians

TOPIC:

Women's Leadership in Veterinary Medicine

LEADING QUESTION:

Is the representation of women increasing in the AVMA's House of Delegates?

META-SUMMARY:

The percentage of women is increasing in the AVMA's House of Delegates at a level commensurate with the increase in percentage of women in the DVM classes.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

Dr. Donald F. Smith, Dean Emeritus of the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, had a passion for the value of the history of veterinary medicine as a gateway for understanding the present and the future of the profession.

Throughout his many professional roles from professor of surgery, to Department Chair of Clinical Sciences, Associate Dean of Education and of Academic Programs and Dean, he spearheaded changes in curriculum, clinical services, diagnostic services and more. He was a diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons and a member of the National Academy of Practices. Most recently he played a major role in increasing the role of women in veterinary leadership.

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine is one of his projects where he was able to share his vast knowledge of the profession.

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